The Builder.

No. CCCXIV.

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 10, 1849.

THE Superintending Inspectors appointed by the Board of Health are actively proceeding in their inquiries, shifting from town to town, receiving evidence, and making general examinations of the locality. We have before us a pile of the evidence offered in different quarters, several communications on the subject, and not a few requests that we should let the London public know what is going on in this respect. The number and extent of the inquiries (though in some cases, we may say in parenthesis, not by any means extensive enough, being conducted on what may be called the "touch and go" system), would prevent us from doing so at any length, even if we were certain that the majority of our readers would be pleased by such a course. We will refer, however, to some of the principal points elicited during two or three of the more recent inquiries.

The bad condition of *Lancaster* in respect of health has been known for some time. Professor Owen, in his startling report on this place, published in the "Second Report of the Commissioners for inquiring into the state of large towns,"* put a mark upon it, which rendered any further proof that remedies are required there unnecessary. Mr. Smith, of Deanston, was the inspector appointed to attend there, and he opened the inquiry at the end of last month. The present mayor of Lancaster is Mr. Edmund Sharpe, architect, who is known to many of our readers by his published works, especially by his fine book, "Architectural Parallels," on the merits of which we spoke at some length not very long ago, and this gentleman went very fully into the subject, and gave a large amount of evidence, not merely in his capacity of mayor, but as representative of a local committee of health.

Hear, however, first, what Mr. Grant, the superintendant registrar of the district, said, as to the rate of mortality there. Omitting the lunatic asylum and workhouse, so far as concerns paupers not belonging to Lancaster, he makes the deaths 29·98 per annum in every thousand, or one in every 37. "The deaths in the rural parts of the district are about 17 per annum per thousand, showing an excess of deaths in Lancaster of 130 per annum." He found some time since that the average age at death in Lancaster was about *twenty-eight years*, while in the other part of the district it is about *thirty-five years*. As regards the infantile mortality of the working class, he found that about 15 per cent. of the deaths of that class are under six months old, about 44 under five years, and nearly 50 per cent. under ten years.

Mr. Sharpe drew the inspector's attention to Mr. Owen's report, already alluded to, and especially to a diagram in it, representing the stream of life in three columns, which it is impossible not to view, in connection with the state of things, without the deepest regret that so little has been done to improve the health of the town, and particularly the health of the poorer classes. This diagram, as the witness pointed out, represents the duration of life in three classes of the inhabitants of Lancaster respectively,—the gentry, the tradesmen, and the operatives,—and it appears from these returns that of every hundred that are born among the gentry, eighty-five live, on the average, to the age of ten years. In other words, it takes ten years to kill off fifteen individuals. How long does it take to kill off the same number among the working classes? According to the same return, only six months! Again, how many of the hundred survive to the age of thirty? Amongst the gentry, 72; amongst the operatives, 36, or one-half the former! Making due allowance for the many other causes that depress the state of health of the young of the poorer classes, it is impossible for us to close our eyes to the probability that the state of the atmosphere in which they live is one of the most important and fatal of those causes. This report was published in 1845, and two years and upwards passed over, continued the witness, without a remedial step of any kind having been taken to abate the shocking state of things so circumstantially described by him. He did not desire to impute blame, but nothing had been done, and eight weeks ago the town was in the same state that it was five years ago. One main point dwelt upon by the witness,—referring both to the sewers and wells of Lancaster, and which will scarcely be credited, even by those accustomed to hear of extraordinary things in matters of this nature,—was, that the whole of the substratum upon which the town of Lancaster stands is strongly impregnated with the sewage of the town. "This is a startling assertion, but the fact is as I say. It is the common practice of builders in Lancaster to carry down the cesspools from water-closets and privies until they reach the gravel; and having done so, to provide no overflow, the whole of the sewage being drained off by the gravel. It frequently happens, that persons opening their cesspools after the lapse of several years, and expecting to find them full, have found them, to their great surprise, entirely empty. The whole contents have gone into the gravelly substratum in which the wells of the whole town are situated. The water in Lancaster is believed by many to be good. There may be isolated instances of good water, under peculiar circumstances of protection to the well, but no analysis that has ever yet been made, gives other than most unsatisfactory results. What has been here said of cesspools applies equally to sewers, public and private, many of which are built with dry walling at the sides, and none of which are water-tight." He then handed in analyses of the water from various wells, made by proper parties, as the foundation of his assertions. Other witnesses corroborated the statement.

Mr. Johnson, a medical man of the town, said that much of what the mayor had stated was fallacious; but afterwards, when giving connected evidence, he said nothing but what was confirmatory of the general statements of the miserable condition of the town in a sanitary point of view.

Evidence was given of the positive occurrence of fever through the stoppage of drains, and of its cessation when the stoppage was removed; of the evils of the window-tax, and the mischief caused by damp paths and roads with a decomposing surface.

We do not find, however, that any material inquiry into the state of the burial-grounds took place,—a circumstance much to be regretted. It does seem most strange that, in spite of the overwhelming amount of evidence which exists proving the death-dealing character of over-crowded burial-grounds in towns, this most important matter is constantly shuffled out of sight by those in power. The victim cannot point to the spot and say, "Here I took the poison;" circumstantial evidence is disregarded, and deaths are looked upon as part of an inevitable course of events, which ought not to have occurred for years, and would not but, for our suicidal disregard of undeniable facts.

At *Whitehaven*, Mr. Rawlinson has been conducting the inquiry; and there Dr. Falcon gave evidence relative to the crowded state of St. Nicholas's, or the old church-yard. He had lived opposite it twenty years, and during that period his family, he said, had suffered greatly from sickness, which he principally attributed to the noxious air which emanated from the church-yard.

The great want complained of here and elsewhere, was an adequate supply of pure water. Mr. Clarke, surgeon, agreeing in this, said something might nevertheless be done by making drains and sewers. The importance of proper sewers might be shown by a case which had come within his own practice as a surgeon. He had been called to attend a case of dysentery, which had arisen from the imperfect state of a drain in George-street, which ran under the lobby of the house of his patient, and was covered only with thin boards. The effluvia arising from the sewer had made the whole of the inhabitants—four persons—exceedingly ill. Two of the cases terminated in death; and, subsequently, he had been called in to attend the other two with fever.

At *Leicester*, Mr. Ranger was the inspector engaged, and much anxiety seems to have been shewn on the part of the inhabitants to give information, and obtain a satisfactory result. The inspector referred, in his opening address, to the comparative average duration of life at Leicester and Billesdon at the last census, from which he said it appeared that the total average loss of life to every individual in Leicester, as compared with the inhabitants of Billesdon, was 12½ years; and taking the population into account, with the average of wages at 7*s.* per week, the total loss in labour had been to this town no less than 981,000*l.* since that time. It was shewn by witnesses that the houses in which the women were engaged in stocking-making were ill-ventilated—in some cases back to back without through air; that the cesspools were often dug down to the springs, to avoid necessity for cleansing out, by which means the water was poisoned; and that the drainage, even in the best parts of the town, was most defective.

As to the supply of water, which will be insisted on by the Central Board here and elsewhere, the inspector said he would at once state that it is intended, in the sanitary regulations to be made, to have a full and *constant* supply of water, and perfect drainage: there is to be no *intermission* of the supplies of water—it will be constantly laid on to each house, and the sewerage will not be allowed to remain in a quiescent state. Indeed, he thought there could be no effectual drainage without an unceasing supply of water; it would be folly to attempt it without. The proper supply of water is, therefore, a matter determined upon.

At *Leeds* the town council have absurdly determined, by a majority of one, to postpone the consideration of the sewerage of the town

* 8vo. edition, vol. ii., p. 71.

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